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# THE PROBLEMS OF BOYHOOD

## A COURSE OF ETHICS FOR BOYS IN THE SUNDAY SCHOOL

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### Study XXI. Measure of Success

Every young man should make success the goal of his life. Whether his life is lived on a high or low plane will depend upon what he means by success and the constancy with which he pursues this ideal. If you ask the first dozen men whom you meet for their definitions of success, you will probably find that they do not agree. Let us consider some of the elements which will most likely be included.

First of all, the acquisition of wealth is a common measure of success. In order to live in any civilized community, one must have many things which only money can secure. One certainly cannot succeed unless he is able to provide for himself at least the necessary food and clothing which his physical life demands. Beyond this the value of money depends upon the use which one makes of it. Is the acquisition of money for its own sake likely to assure a man's success in the highest sense? What are the characteristics which this aim is likely to develop in a man? Tell the story of Midas. Discuss the saying of Paul: "The love of money is the root of all evil" (I Tim. 6:10). Jesus taught that riches are a spiritual hindrance. Discuss his saying: "It is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle, than for a rich man to

enter into the kingdom of God" (Mark 10:25).

A few years ago the leading business men of the country were spoken of as "captains of industry"; now they are more often referred to as the "predatory rich." What has brought about this change in the public attitude?

Another measure of success, in the minds of some people, is social position or influence in the community. Both these aims are worthy enough in themselves if they are not too highly valued and if they are used for good ends. What contributes to social standing and influence in your community? What are the characteristics of the most influential man you know? How did he secure his influence? For what ends does he use his power? Contrast two men of influence, one of whom seems to you to have secured his power in an honorable manner and to use it for worthy ends, the other of whom has secured his influence and employs it in an unworthy manner.

A third measure of success is happiness. This has the backing of many philosophers, and, like wealth and influence, may be a worthy end to seek. We must, however, define what we mean by happiness before we can subscribe to this as a measure of success. Is

happiness that is secured only by physical comfort or by pleasurable sensation a worthy measure of success? Give some specific illustration of this. Does happiness result chiefly from a man's wealth, from his work, from his health? Does the possession of millions of dollars necessarily bring happiness? What seems to you to be the fundamental basis of happiness?

None of those three measures of success by itself seems wholly to satisfy us. Would you choose to become the richest man in your town at the cost of lost health? Would you deliberately choose to become mayor of your city at the cost of bribery and dishonor? If everyone were contented with his present lot, what hope would there be of progress? But the possession of wealth to be spent for the social good, of influence to be used for the betterment of society, of happiness secured through service for

others, are all ends highly to be desired. The added element of service, then, makes any one of the commonly accepted standards of success worthy of our best efforts. Jesus discussed the relative importance of the various ends for which men strive: e.g., Matt. 6:19-34. What did he mean when he said (Matt. 6:34): "But seek ye first the Kingdom of God and his righteousness, and all these things shall be added unto you"? Was his life a success or a failure? Discuss the life of Lincoln from the standpoint of success. Is the judgment of a man's contemporaries as to his success always correct?

Do you know of any wealthy men who may be called successful according to this higher standard of service? Discuss the use they make of their wealth. Discuss some men who use their powerful social position or influence in the service of others.

## **Study XXII. The Choice of a Life-Work: Medicine; Law**

We discussed in the last study the measure by which a man should rate success. A boy is confronted with the serious question: What shall I do in order to secure the maximum amount of happiness through the maximum amount of service rendered to society? A few generations ago, this was a relatively simple problem; now it is a very complex one. Discuss the reasons for this change.

We shall agree that success in any occupation or profession requires that a boy be well prepared. Adequate provision is made at public expense through the public elementary schools

for acquiring the fundamentals of an education. The high school, college, and university also make possible the specialized training required for the professions and technical pursuits. The present movement for industrial education looks toward a complete training for skilled industrial workers in the various industries.

Boys often leave school as soon as they reach the age required by law and go to work. The only occupation they can secure is often a "blind-alley" job, which leads to no advancement. What jobs of this sort do you know of? What is the age at which compulsory educa-

tion ends in your state? If boys can be taught a trade, will they be more eager to remain in school after they have reached the legal age? Would you favor increasing the age of required school attendance?

The opportunity for the necessary training is evidently at hand; the important thing is the choice of a life-work. A wrong choice is a serious loss. Doubtless many a good farmer has been lost to make a poor lawyer. Whether a boy shall become a professional man, a farmer, a merchant, or a mechanic is not a question of the relative importance of these various occupations from the social, financial, or any other point of view, for they are all important and desirable; it is merely the question in which of these occupations is he best fitted by nature to secure success. How may he answer this question intelligently? To whom may he go for advice? His father may be able to help him, perhaps his teacher. Vocational advisers are provided by some school systems for this purpose. Until recently chance or a passing whim has had most to do with this important decision in a boy's life. Before making the choice, a boy should seek the best possible advice and should find out all he can about the requirements for success in the field of work which he is thinking of entering. Let us take up briefly a number of the professions and other occupations from the point of view of the training required and the conditions which are involved in their pursuit.

#### **Medicine**

For a training in medicine, the best medical schools are now requiring at least two years of college work for admis-

sion; some of the best schools require a complete college course before the student may begin the study of medicine. The opportunity which the practice of medicine affords for service to humanity is almost unlimited. The great discoveries in medicine have prevented untold suffering. Mention some discoveries and discuss their results, e.g., the use of ether as an anaesthetic. Physicians have given their lives for mankind in the pursuit of knowledge of diseases. Dr. Howard T. Ricketts of the Rush Medical College, while studying the spotted fever, lost his life by contracting this disease. Physicians are studying the cause and prevention of many diseases, e.g., cancer, and it is probable that they will learn to control or prevent one after another the diseases which have thus far baffled them. Discuss the progress that has been made with such diseases as smallpox, diphtheria, typhoid fever, tuberculosis. What diseases are still beyond their control? What are the physical demands which a physician's life involves? What special opportunities has a physician to exert a strong moral influence? Are physicians generally wealthy men? What are the hardships of a physician's life? What seem to you to be the chief sources of satisfaction that a physician may expect?

#### **Law**

The best law schools now require for admission two years of college work and some of them require the completion of a college course. The law offers the most common avenue to public life, furnishing a large number of the more prominent politicians and public-office holders. A lawyer with high ideals may find

abundant opportunity for disinterested public service. Give some illustration. Lincoln secured the epithet "honest Abe" from his practice of the law. Can an honest lawyer defend a client whom he knows to be guilty? It is sometimes thought that a boy who shows an aptitude for public speaking is for this reason specially adapted for the legal profession. There are some things far more impor-

tant than this. The practice of law often does not involve the pleading of cases in court. A sound knowledge of the law and good judgment in giving advice are more important than brilliancy in speech. Mention some great lawyers who have maintained the highest standards for success. Do lawyers in general seem to you to maintain high standards?

### **Study XXIII. The Choice of a Life-Work—Continued**

#### **Teaching**

Teaching does not usually make a strong appeal to a boy as a life-work. To what extent is this due to the small salaries of teachers? to the impression which your teachers made on you? to the unattractiveness of a teacher's work? The great majority of teachers in this country are women; in Germany all the teachers in the schools corresponding to our high schools are men. Has this anything to do with the situation? With the more exacting professional training required of teachers and the corresponding increase in salaries, it is likely that teaching will become a more attractive profession for men. What seem to you to be the most essential requirements for successful teaching? No profession, save possibly the ministry, offers a greater opportunity for effective social service. The high-school teacher has unusual opportunities. Why is this? Discuss the relative importance of the church, the school, and the home in the moral training of high-school boys. How may a high-school teacher best influence the character of his students?

#### **The Ministry**

Perhaps the ministry seems even less attractive than teaching to the boy who is thinking of his life-work. Discuss the reasons for this. Thousands of the best young men in our colleges have enlisted as student volunteers in the work of the Christian ministry in foreign lands. Why does the life of the foreign missionary make a stronger appeal to young men than that of the preacher at home? Great changes have taken place in the scope and method of training men for the ministry. A thorough study of the conditions and needs of society, and of the means by which the church may meet these, has taken the place of much of the formal, doctrinal teaching of the past. The work of the minister is coming to have a vital connection with the real issues of the life of today. The ministry of the modern church should appeal to a boy who really desires to to use his talents to the utmost advantage. Discuss the church as a social center for the education and amusement as well as for the strictly religious training of the community. Should a minister confine his preaching simply

to what are regarded as religious subjects, or should he discuss the social and political questions of the day?

### **Business**

In earlier years only those boys went to college who were preparing for one of the so-called learned professions. Now the majority of the members of the graduating classes of our large universities intend to enter business. Is a college course necessary for success in business? What advantages has a college graduate in business? Is he likely to make a greater success than the man who began as a boy to learn the business by actual experience? Why is a business life so attractive to a boy? Compare the methods of business today with those of former times. Discuss the effect of the telephone, typewriter, stenography, etc., upon the life of a business man. What are the best uses a business man can make of his leisure? Which have the greater influence upon the life of a city or town, its professional or its business men? What are the advantages and disadvantages of business as a life-work?

### **Engineering**

The various branches of engineering, mechanical, electrical, civil, etc., afford an attractive field for young men whose interests and abilities lie in the field of mathematics and applied sciences. The great material development of an industrial and commercial age offers a vast field for the use of engineering skill. Ability and training of a high order will command an excellent financial return. Many boys have doubtless taken up the study of engineering without a very good idea of what was involved. Only rarely

is a Goethals needed to dig an inter-oceanic canal; most engineers live inconspicuous lives with their full share of drudgery and hardship, and without large financial returns. Before deciding upon any form of engineering, one should, if possible, talk with some experienced engineer. Training in engineering furnishes excellent preparation for many kinds of business, particularly in manufacturing lines. Discuss some of the most conspicuous achievements in the field of modern engineering.

### **Farming**

One of the most marked characteristics of the present time is the tendency for people to crowd together into cities. The most ambitious boys from the country have left the farms for the life of the city. What has attracted them? But in the last few years, there has been a noticeable change. Life in the country has become more comfortable and attractive. Discuss the effect of the telephone and rural mail delivery upon life on the farm. What other similar changes have come about? Agricultural colleges and courses in agriculture in the high schools have introduced scientific methods of tilling the soil, dairying, and other farm activities. The modern farmer, then, is a man of scientific training, who lives under conditions as hygienic and comfortable as the dwellers in the towns or cities. What are the comparative advantages of country and city life? Which seem to you the greater? Discuss the effect of improved machinery upon the life of the farmer.

*Topics for further discussion:* The mechanical trades; forestry; the army and navy; politics.

**Study XXIV. Religion**

We have reserved to the last the supreme problem of boyhood, his relation to God. Man is by nature a religious being. Our minds naturally inquire the origin of matter and of life and find an adequate explanation only in a supreme intelligence which has created and which now controls the universe. Primitive peoples have seen the exhibition of God in the sun, in fire, and in other natural objects and phenomena and have made these the objects of worship. Show how this was natural. The highly imaginative Greeks developed a great and complex system of gods. The Hebrews conceived the idea of one God, the all-wise, all-powerful, everywhere-present ruler of the universe.

Whether one is a Jew or a Christian, a Methodist or a Baptist depends in a large degree upon the religious belief of his parents. But religion is fundamentally a personal matter, and, as such, is not concerned primarily with matters of creed, or with forms of worship, but is rather a matter of experience and finds its expression in conduct. Jesus said (Matt. 7:21): "Not every one that saith unto me, Lord, Lord, shall enter into the kingdom of heaven; but he that doeth the will of my Father which is in heaven." In the Epistle of James, we find religion defined as follows: "Pure religion and undefiled before God and the Father is this, To visit the fatherless and widows in their affliction, and to keep himself unspotted from the world" (James 1:27). What two aspects of religion are included here? Is this all there is to religion?

If your parents are members of a church, you have probably been accus-

tomed to attend church and Sunday school; perhaps you have yourself joined some church. If so, have you ever thought out for yourself what are your obligations to your church and community? If you have not yet become a member of a church, have you thought seriously about your obligation to do so?

The church represents those ideals which are most important for the moral and social welfare of the community. Discuss the influence of the church in such questions as the saloon, the social evil, child welfare. What would be the conditions of your town if the churches were removed? To be sure, not all men who are influential in moral issues are church members. Consider who are the most influential men in your community. How many of them are not members of churches? Are the churches becoming more or less influential in matters concerning the public welfare? Can you not probably make your life count for more in your community by uniting with some church? Membership in a church assures one the sympathy and help of others. Do you not need such a help and safeguard?

In order to be religious or to be in right relationship with God, is it necessary to be a member of a church? Is the fact that there are persons outside the church who live more exemplary lives than some church members a good argument against uniting with the church? If you are a member of a church, what benefits have you received from this membership? Should one rate the value of church membership solely on the basis of benefits received?

What do you contribute to the work of your church?

What are the hindrances which keep boys from uniting with the church? The ceremonies required in the act of joining the church often do not appeal to a boy. He finds it difficult to understand their meaning. What is the value and meaning of such a ceremony as baptism? Would church membership be as significant if it were secured without any formal ceremony? The activities of the church have often been adapted to the needs of older persons rather than to boys. Emphasis has seemed until recently to be placed more on the things which a member may not do than upon the enjoyable activities in which he may share. What restrictions has the church in the past placed upon amusements? What changes are taking place in this respect? What opportunities does your church afford

for a boy to have a good time? What further opportunities would you suggest in this direction? What is the basis upon which to decide what it is proper for a member of a church to do?

People sometimes seem to regard religion as a matter belonging only to Sunday. What relation has religion to a man's conduct in the office or the factory? Has religion anything to do with a boy on the football field or in the classroom at school? If religion is a matter of living, is there any place or activity to which it does not belong? If you are not a member of a church, what satisfactory reason can you give for not becoming such?

*Topics for discussion:* Asceticism of the Middle Ages; Christ's attitude toward social life (see John 2:1-11); the church as a social center; organized labor and the church.